

***Iowa Outdoors***  
**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**[www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com)**

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**IOWA BECOMES FOCUS FOR STUDY ON DECLINING SCAUP POPULATION**

By Lowell Washburn  
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

KEOKUK---Don't be too surprised if you happen to spot a lime green, fluorescent orange, or bright red duck swimming across your favorite wetland this spring.

According to Louisiana State University wildlife research assistant, Mike Szymanski, the kaleidoscope colored ducks are all part of an ongoing study designed to provide answers as to why populations of lesser scaup are on the wane. Known to most duck hunters as bluebills, lesser scaup are an important waterfowl species of the Mississippi Flyway. But while most duck species have shown healthy increases during the past decade, overall scaup numbers have shown an alarming decline. Although no one can say why scaup populations are falling off so rapidly, finding the answers may depend in part on keeping track of color coded bluebills as they travel to Canadian breeding areas.

"This study will ultimately involve hundreds of people from Louisiana to Canada," said Szymanski. "Currently, we are [bait] trapping, banding, and color marking as many migrating lesser scaup as we can get our hands on."

The capture efforts are focused on the Mississippi River at Keokuk where large numbers of the ducks stage during spring and fall migrations. With this year's spring migration currently reaching its peak, scientists hope to capture and color mark between 3,000 and 5,000 of the northbound ducks. As the birds disperse across Iowa and points

beyond, researchers are relying on public sightings to help unravel the mystery of scaup migration.

"What we are attempting is to document migration corridors and rates of movements from Keokuk to the breeding grounds in the boreal forest region of western Canada," said Szymanski.

"It's possible that during the first half of the spring migration, a majority of scaup may visit the Dakotas. Later in the migration, more birds may travel north across Minnesota. At this point, we don't know the exact routes they travel, and visual sightings will play a key role in providing that information. What we're really looking for is the when and where of scaup migration."

What researchers do know is that when northbound scaup arrive at Keokuk, they are in excellent body condition. However, as the migration continues across Iowa many of the birds begin to lose weight. Biologists say the weight loss could result in decreased egg production, reduced survival of adult females, and lower population recruitment.

"At this point, no one can say for sure why scaup are losing weight as they travel across Iowa," says Szymanski. "It could be food, it could be parasites, it could be contaminants. Once we have those answers we can begin working on a solution."

During the next two summers, biologists plan to sample wetland feeding grounds in Iowa, Minnesota, and North Dakota. Researchers will be looking at the abundance of invertebrate marsh life [the primary protein source for migrating scaup], testing for chemical pollutants, and measuring the level of sedimentation due to agricultural runoff.

"There is strong evidence that migrating scaup are missing some important forage. It may be related to invertebrate abundance which could be related to water quality," said Szymanski. "During the next two years we plan to look at habitat conditions across those areas. We'll also continue to monitor the body condition of migrating scaup and see how that matches up against historical data."

Public sightings are important to project success. Observations of color-marked scaup can be reported via the internet at <http://www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/> or by phone at 1-888-646-6367.

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## **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO HELP PLANT WILDFLOWERS**

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hosting volunteer opportunities geared toward increasing native plant diversity at three wildlife

areas. Volunteers are needed to help plant a total of 5,000 plants at the Kellerton wildlife area, Ledges State Park area, and the Otter Creek wildlife area.

“We’ve always planted native grasses on these areas and what we are trying to do with these events is to increase the native plant diversity, making them showcase areas,” said Bill Johnson, who heads up the DNR’s native seed collection effort. Some of the wildflowers to be planted include butterfly milkweed, prairie blazing star and great blue lobelia.

The Kellerton workday is April 17 beginning around 9 a.m., the Otter creek workday begins at 10 a.m., May 1, and the Ledges workday begins at 10 a.m., May 15. Each workday is scheduled for four hours. Johnson said volunteers could work for four hours or for as little as one hour.

“We are just looking for people to help us put these plants in the ground,” he said. “These are four to six inch plants, similar to tomato plants you would buy at a greenhouse. Anybody can do it.”

Volunteers should plan to bring outdoor work clothes and a watering can, if they have one.

**For more information, contact Johnson at 515-432-2823.**

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## **TIME TO ORDER TREES AND SHRUBS**

Des Moines – If the thought of establishing some wildlife habitat or reducing soil erosion on your acreage has been on your mind, now is the perfect time to order conservation trees and shrubs from the Iowa State Forest Nursery.

The State Forest Nursery, located in Ames, supplies more than 40 different native tree and shrub species for conservation bareroot seedlings for purchase by Iowa landowners for conservation purposes, including reforestation, soil erosion control, water quality protection and wildlife habitat. These seedlings are sold at the cost of production.

“We have excellent supplies at the State Forest Nursery of native oaks [red, white, bur and swamp white] along with good quantities of walnut, silver maple and many other species for this spring’s planting season,” said John Walkowiak, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau.

Conservation trees and shrubs range in cost from \$25/100 plants for evergreen species such as pine and spruce to \$37 to \$45/100 plants for hardwood trees and shrubs such as oak and chokecherry. The minimum order is 500 plants.

“If you are looking at just starting out in conservation planting, you may want to consider planting a wildlife packet of 200 trees and shrubs that includes such species as bur oak, gray dogwood, white spruce and common lilac. Or you could consider a specialty wildlife packet designed in cooperation the National Wild Turkey Federation and Pheasants Forever,” Walkowiak said. These “Wildlife” packets sell for \$90.

For more information or to order conservation trees and shrubs from the State Forest Nursery call 1-800-865-2477 or check out [www.iowatreeplanting.com](http://www.iowatreeplanting.com)

**For more information, contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966.**

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## **TURKEY HABITAT – TIME TO ORDER**

AMES - Turkey hunters and turkey enthusiasts can make a big difference in the number of turkeys that use their land. The wild turkey’s favorite food includes acorns and dogwood berries.

“Turkeys and many other species of wildlife can greatly benefit when we plant certain species of trees and shrubs. Oak trees and dogwood shrubs are right at the top of the list,” said Stan Tate, district forester with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Right now is the time to order Turkey Packets to plant in April. The packets are inexpensive, and for a few hours pleasant work, you can attract turkeys for many years to come, Tate said. Plant once, but enjoy for many years.

“The Turkey Packet is grown by the forestry bureau, and has to be one of the best bargains of all time,” he said.

The packet costs \$90 and consists of 50 burr oak, 50 red oak, 50 pin oak, and 50 gray dogwood shrubs. This selection is approved by the Iowa Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation.

“These trees and shrubs are all grown right here in Iowa, from seed collected right here in Iowa; so you know that you are getting high quality plants that are meant to be grown here,” Tate said.

Turkey packets are not just for turkeys, but will help many species of wildlife including song birds. “These plantings make our state more attractive, and a nicer place to live,” he said.

Ordering is easy, just call 1-800-865-2477 and ask for the Turkey Packet. Other packets and many other species are also available, just call for information or go to [www.iowatreeplanting.com](http://www.iowatreeplanting.com).

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